

# A Painter's Ray of Hope

By GIRIRAJ AGARWAL

**T**he universal image of the artist as a gifted creator struggling to conserve his art despite straitened circumstances is personified by painter Mohan Malviya. After all, he has not forgotten the days when he did not even have a roof over his head, nor could he afford to buy proper paint and paper. Still he continued working in different forms—from ceramics to watercolor—and kept his artistic ambitions alive. Then, in 2004, recognition came in the form of an \$11,000 grant from the New York-based Pollock-Krasner Foundation, enabling Malviya to hold 10 exhibitions across India over a period of two years. “There was a time when I did not have even Rs. 10 to buy paper; but thanks to the grant I was able to buy expensive paper and paint. It made a huge difference to my art.”

When Malviya was starting out as an artist in Bhopal in 1996 he would paint through the night at the Bharat Bhavan complex and spend his days soaking in the works of such painters as Jagdish Swaminathan, Akhilesh Verma (his mentor) and Sayed Haider Raza, imbibing their techniques. During this period he was also deeply influenced by the works of major American artists such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. At that time he never imagined that a grant from an institution named after his favorite artist would help him take his creativity to a higher level.

Malviya was born in Ratanpur village in the Khargaon district of Madhya Pradesh. His initial artistic forays were undoubtedly inspired by folk art and the environment. He

was as much attracted to the idols created during festivals like Naag Panchami and Govardhan Puja as he was fascinated by the rock-lined banks of the Narmada River at Vimleshwar Ghat. These initial steps led Malviya to the portals of the Deolalikar Art College in Indore for formal art studies. An encounter with painter M.F. Husain left lasting impressions on his young mind.

By the time the 27-year-old Malviya arrived at Bharat Bhavan he had extended his oeuvre to ceramics but still struggled to make headway in the art world. “I was not interested in farming, my paintings did not sell and I was jobless,” he recalls. In a frenetic burst earlier in Indore, Malviya had completed 150 paintings. So he exhibited about 100 of these at Bhopal and managed to sell four to Priya Paul, chairperson of Apeejay

Surrendra Park Hotels, for Rs. 18,000. Malviya describes this as the “turning point” in his career. In 2002 he contributed a gigantic 31-meter by 1.5-meter canvas for the Silk Route Festival curated by Rajeev Sethi. He also began working on paper and stone. “For five months I worked furiously in a farmhouse,” recalls Malviya. The effort was financially rewarding.

“On the encouragement of my friends I prepared a four-line proposal for the Pollock-Krasner Foundation stating that I wanted to work in metal. I mentioned my plan to create a 2.4-meter by 1.2-meter painting and to cast some of my art work in gold and bronze.” He sent 10 slides to the foundation with a recommendation from Sethi and painters Radhakrishnan and Akhilesh Verma. He soon received a letter stating that he had been selected for the



*Naad series, brass and silver, 30 x 30 cm.*



*Naad series, acrylic on canvas, 70 x 70 cm.*

grant. “I was in Delhi but my friends celebrated my achievement in Indore!” he recalls.

What does the future hold? “I enjoy being an independent painter and like working on handmade paper with acrylic colors.”

Malviya describes the Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant as a “ray of hope” for artists who find it difficult to get support in India. Referring to the ups and downs of his artistic career, Malviya says: “Whenever I fail I realize that I must have gone wrong somewhere, then work hard to overcome the shortcoming.”

The Pollock-Krasner Foundation was established in 1985 and has helped artists from 65 countries, including India, with grants totaling \$37 million. In 2004, Malviya was among four Indian artists chosen for the grant. The other three were Sukumaran Pradip from Trivandrum, Aseem Purkayasth from New Delhi and Tanmaya Samanta from West Bengal. □



*Naad series, acrylic on paper, 198 x 20 cm.*